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IV.—THE PERSONALITY OF THE EPICUREAN GODS.

Before describing the extent to which the Epicureans attributed personality to the gods, it is important to bear in mind the place which Epicureanism gave to religion in life and the influence that the Epicurean school allowed to religion as a great impelling, uplifting influence for mankind. The ardor of Lucretius, Velleius and Philodemus is so intense that there is no gainsaying the testimony of these Epicureans. We are not to interpret their fervid testimony as an expression merely of the individual experiences of these three exponents, but as representing the explicit purpose of the founder of the school whose intent rested as a solemn obligation upon the conscience of his disciples. We learn from Diogenes Laertius¹ that Epicurus' piety toward the gods was too deep for words; among the inalienable possessions of the virtuous man Epicurus² counted as of prime importance "holy opinions about the gods". The letter to Menoeceus closes as follows: *Ταῦτα οὖν καὶ τὰ τούτοις συγγενῇ μελέτα πρὸς σεαυτὸν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός . . . καὶ οὐδέποτε οὐθ' ὕπαρ οὐτ' ὄναρ διαταραχθήσῃ, ζήσεις δὲ ὡς θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις.*³ Lucretius had unbounded enthusiasm for his master and his master's definitive opinions about the gods and the proper worship of them. Velleius, too, was stirred by a profound admiration and reverence for Epicurus and had the mystic's rapture for the mighty power of Infinity that inspired

¹ Diog. Laert. X, 10. *τῆς μὲν γὰρ πρὸς θεοὺς ὁσιότητος ἄλεκτος ἡ διάθεσις.* Cf. Usener, *Epicurea*, p. 364.

² Diog. Laert. X, 133; cf. Usener, p. 65. For a study of Epicurus, as a religious enthusiast, see Picavet, *De Epicuro Novae Religionis Auctore*, 1888, and by the same author "Épicure Fondateur d'une Religion Nouvelle" in *Rev. de l'Hist. des Rel.* xxvii (1893), pp. 315-344.

³ Diog. Laert. X, 135; cf. Usener, p. 66. Cf. Lucretius, III, 322; Philodemus, *Περὶ Εὐσεβείας* (Gomperz, 1866), p. 148, vv. 12-19; idem, *De Deor. Victu*, VH¹ VI, col. 1, in Usener, p. 258; "L'Inscription Philos. d'Oenoanda" in *Bull. de Corr. Hell.* xxi (1897), p. 369, vv. 2-10. col. 4.

great and earnest contemplation. Philodemus came under the same spell of this dogmatic evangel and shared the conviction that worship of Epicurean gods of "surpassing power and goodness" was instinctive.¹ The same imperial power was exercised over the mind of Diogenes of Oenoanda² as late as two hundred years after Christ.

The very first of the "Fundamental Maxims" of Epicurus is concerned with the question of divinity and we find: *Τὸ μακάριον καὶ ἀφθαρτον οὔτε αὐτὸ πράγματα ἔχει οὔτε ἄλλῃ παρέχει, ὥστε οὔτε ὀργαῖς οὔτε χάρισι συνέχεται. ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον.*³ The note that is appended to this, the first of the *Κύριαι Δόξαι*, howsoever obscure in other respects, clearly comments on divine nature as beyond the reach of our senses, as recognizable in its essence through reason alone and as perfected in human form. It was inevitable that Epicurus should also associate with divinity supreme wisdom, beauty and justice.⁴ Epicurus dogmatically⁵ maintained certain predicates of divinity as fundamental essentials, but at the same time allowed wide latitude to speculation regarding the gods: *πρῶτον μὲν τὸν θεὸν ζῶν ἀφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον νομίζων, ὡς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη, μηθὲν μῆτε τῆς ἀφθαρσίας ἀλλότριον μῆτε τῆς μακαριότητος ἀνοίκειον αὐτῷ πρόσαπτε. πᾶν δὲ τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετὰ ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτὸν δόξαζε.*⁶ With Epicurus' fundamental conceptions of God in his heart and mind, the Epicurean worshipper was free to make such other associations

¹ Philodemus, p. 128, vv. 12-22; idem, de Musica, VH¹ I, c. 4, 6, in Usener, p. 258.

² Diogenis Oenoand. Fragmenta (William, 1907), e. g., pp. 18-19, pp. 51-56, etc.; cf. also Sen. Ep. 25, 5: *sic fac, inquit, omnia tamquam spectet Epicurus.*

³ Diog. Laert. X, 139 [Usener, p. 71]; cf. Diog. Laert. X, 97 [Usener, p. 42], Diog. Laert. X, 77 [Usener, p. 28], Lucretius, II, 646-651, Cic. N. D. I 17, 45.

⁴ Diog. Laert. X, 132 [Usener, p. 64]: *Τούτων δὲ πάντων ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν φρόνησις . . . ἐξ ἧς αἱ λοιπαὶ πᾶσαι πεφύκασιν ἀρεταί, διδάσκουσα ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ζῆν ἄνευ τοῦ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως <οὐδὲ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως> ἄνευ τοῦ ἡδέως.*

⁵ The truth of his theological doctrine was guaranteed by the foundations of *πρόληψις* (or *anticipatio*) upon which it rested, and further fortified by deductions from nature and reason; see Cic. N. D. I 17, 44-18, 49.

⁶ Diog. Laert. X, 123 [Usener, pp. 59, 60].

as were compatible with these fundamentals or essentials. There was a remarkable freedom within these limitations,¹ allowing many a *rapprochement* between the Epicurean philosophy of religion and the orthodox beliefs that were the subject of reconstruction. The differences between the two systems have often been dwelt upon and the bitter hostilities between the two are well known; the points of contact, however, are more likely to escape observation. It will be my aim to prove that the Epicurean school carried over from the old religion definite concepts of individuality and personality that distinguished one god from another,—whereby the gods were much more clearly visualized to the Epicurean vision than has been commonly conceded.²

The worshipful Epicurean who comprehended the essentials of Epicurean theology and who, following the dictates³ of the founder of the school, engaged in established worship, found himself worshipping gods characterized and differentiated by a wealth of personal associations to which he could subscribe. The worshipful Epicurean was peculiarly subject to reactions from participation in cults that did honor to different divinities. Τὰ δὲ τοσαῦτα λεγέσθω καὶ νῦν, ὅτι τὸ δαιμόνιον μὲν οὐ προσδεῖ[τ]αί τινος τιμῆς, ἡμῖν δὲ φυσικόν ἐστιν αὐτὸ τιμᾶν μάλιστα μὲ[ν] ὁσίαις [ὑ]πολή[ψ]εισιν, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τοῖς κατὰ τὸ πάτριον παραδεδομένοις [ἐ]κάστωι τῶν κατὰ μέρος.⁴ It was the old gods, worshipped under the old names, that constituted the nucleus of the Epicurean pantheon. The Epicurean polytheism was based on the Hellenic,⁵ to such an extent in fact that Philodemus could not conceive of the gods as speaking any other

¹ Cf. Schoemann, *De Epicuri Theologia*, 1864, p. 12: Permittendum igitur ut de his, quae sciri nequirent, pro suo quisque captu quod maxime probabile et cum iis, de quibus certo constaret, consentaneum videretur, ex coniectura secum ipse statueret.

² Schoemann, *De Epicuri Theologia*, 1864, p. 18; Zeller, *The Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics* [tr., Reichel, 1892], p. 469; Wallace, *Epicureanism*, 1908, pp. 205, 206, 209; Masson, *Lucretius, Epicurean and Poet*, 1907, pp. 263. n. 2, 279, 281, 285; cf. Cic. N. D. I 29, 80: si una omnium facies est, . . si enim nihil inter deum et deum differt (see also I 30, 84).

³ Philodemus, pp. 118, 120, 126, 127, 128.

⁴ Philodemus, *De Musica*, VH¹ I, c. 4, 6 in Usener, p. 258.

⁵ Philodemus, p. 84, vv. 24-34.

than the Hellenic tongue or something closely akin to it.¹ The Epicurean gods were the ancient gods purified, refined, etherealized. The Epicurean School waged war, not against the gods of Greece and Rome, but against the false popular and false philosophic notions about the gods.² Conscientious worship was no slight intellectual effort. There was much in the cults that to Epicurean intellectual piety seemed unworthy and untrue; all that was in violation of Epicurean denial of the old theory of divine Providence or all that was out of harmony with Epicurean ideal ethics of the Godhead was offensive to Epicurean reason, in worship. Epithets of *γενέλιος*, *θεσμοφόρος* and *φυτάλμιος* were, literally interpreted, false epithets as applied to Zeus, Demeter and Poseidon. Plutarch³ accused the Epicureans of plucking these appellations from the gods. Very true! but rebellion against false epithets, I mean to show, was part of a religious movement that aimed at establishment of pure and true concepts of Zeus, Demeter, Poseidon, and all the other gods of Greek religion. Philodemus' concern was that the wise man should entertain pure and sinless opinions of God, should comprehend God's great and august nature, and especially at the festivals proceed to this knowledge.⁴ The Lucretian exhortation was to the same effect, counselling the Epicurean worshipper to banish from his mind whatever was "degrading to the gods and inconsistent with their peace".⁵ The Epicurean philosophy of religion and the Epicurean theoretic theology did not conflict with all of the ancient pagan premises, but could carry over whatever attributes met with the approbation of Epicurean sense, reason

¹ Philodemus, *De Deor. Victu*, VH¹ VI (Naples, 1839), col. xiv—*καὶ νῆ Δία γε τὴν Ἑλληνίδα νομιστέον ἔχειν αὐτοὺς διάλεκτον, ἢ μὴ πόρρω . . . καὶ μόνον οἶδαμεν γεγονότας θεοὺς Ἑλληνίδι γλώττῃ χρωμένους.*

² Diog. Laert. X, 123. *θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσὶν* seq., in Usener, p. 60; Lucretius, V, 1198–1203.

³ Plut. *adv. Col.*, c. 22, 1119 E.

⁴ Philodemus, p. 106 [Usener, p. 258], p. 120, vv. 18–20.

⁵ Lucretius VI, 68–69; cf. II, 652–657. Lucretius here gives his consent to the old use of the names of gods as symbolism. But such metonymy or symbolism was harmless and did no violation to the Epicurean belief in the true nature and life of the gods: I, 250; II, 472; III, 221; IV, 1107, 1168; V, 656, 897, etc.

and experience.¹ Epicurean worship permitted an acceptance of and emotional surrender to all truth and to all the symbolism to which the Epicurean could give intellectual assent.

Let us take, as partially illustrative, Velleius' extended exposition and criticism² of the views of philosophers.³ Throughout runs a fundamental note, the Epicurean belief that the materialistic gods possess a form and organism such as we recognize in human creation to be superior to all others. The body of the gods is most beautiful, subject to neither bodily nor mental affections, free from the ravages of disease, age and oblivion, and not requiring sleep. The divine body is immortal,⁴ knowing no beginning and no end. Divinity experiences sensation and possesses reason, such as is in harmony with its body and possible only through the medium of the body. His happiness is that of the prudent and powerful God for whom quiet is a corollary of beatitude. This representation of the gods, quite in accord with the fundamentals of Epicurus himself, is obviously a reconstruction of older beliefs with especial emphasis upon the cherished theory of anthropomorphism. Besides, Velleius resented as fatal to religion all tendencies towards spirituality, towards allegorizing, towards a differentiation between a natural god and popular gods.⁵ He thought so much

¹ The logic of this situation was accentuated for every Epicurean at all serious in his religious inquiry by his emotional appreciation of the externals of noble ceremony. In the *De Rerum Natura* there is not much evidence to indicate the poet's emotional inclination to the ritualistic and ceremonial side of the organized religion of the Roman people. The invocation and the account of the *Magna Mater* cult give us our only real clues. Other religious material is now and again employed in the interests of poetry without provoking enthusiasm; temples, altars, groves, sacrifices, shrines and images of gods are all mentioned but appear as a poor symbolism to express divine immortality. Yet against this negative evidence we have the majestic description of the Cybele cult—*bene et eximie . . . disposita*—and we read in it the profound influence of ceremonial upon the esthetic nature of Lucretius; cf. Philodemus, p. 128, vv. 5-12.

² Cic. N. D. I 10, 25 . . . 15, 41.

³ Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Empedocles, Protagoras, Democritus, Plato, Xenophon, Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, and others.

⁴ Cf. Philodemus, p. 86, vv. 25-32; Lucretius, *passim*.

⁵ Cf. Philodemus, on allegory, pp. 77, 79, 80, 85, on natural vs. popular gods, pp. 72, 84.

in the terms of the old anthropomorphic polytheism that these more liberal views were, to his mind, no less prejudicial to religion than the mythologies of poets, the errors of the Magi, the madness of Egyptians or the extravagant notions of the multitude, which from ignorance of the truth was at all times involved in uncertainty. Epicureans' participation in established religious ceremonials, sacrifices, worship, festivals and prayers of the national religion, their continued use of the old terminology of names and epithets, must have resulted in a preservation to a large extent of distinct personalities of a Zeus, a Hera, an Apollo, an Ares, a Dionysos, a Demeter, an Athena, an Aphrodite, a Rhea, a Hestia, a Hermes, or in Rome of Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Vulcan, Ceres, Neptune, Bacchus, Magna Mater or of Venus.¹ It is difficult to see how Epicurean participation in organized Graeco-Roman religion could have resulted otherwise than in a maintenance of distinctions between the gods and goddesses of their worship.

Velleius says that Zeno in his interpretation of Hesiod's Theogony entirely destroyed the established notions of the gods;² for he excluded Jupiter, Juno and Vesta and those esteemed divine from the number of the gods. Again, in criticism of Chrysippus,³ Velleius is indignant at the Stoic interpretation of Jupiter, Neptune, Ceres and other gods. Velleius wished to retain the concepts of Jupiter, Juno, Vesta, Neptune and Ceres instead of entirely destroying them as he conceived that the Stoics had done by their theories of origins.⁴ Velleius' dogmatism is a protest in favor of older beliefs which the Epicureans did not attack as iconoclasts but as reconstructionists, rescuing what was acceptable to Epicurean reason.

The reply of the Academician and pontifex, Cotta,—unsparingly ridicule and criticism of Velleius' exposition that it is—throws further light upon the question of the personality of the Epicurean gods. Cotta was opposed to limiting our conception of God to the human form and argued for greater freedom. He says:

“Non pudet igitur physicum, id est speculatorem venato-

¹ I mention the names of these gods because they all come under discussion in Epicurean texts.

² Cic. N. D. I 14, 36.

³ Cic. N. D. I 15, 39-40.

⁴ Cf. Cic. N. D. III 25, 64-65.

remque naturae, ab animis consuetudine imbutis petere testimonium veritatis?"¹

i. e., the Epicureans, in their conclusions about the form and nature of the gods, were too much influenced by the accidents of Graeco-Roman religion and theology. Cotta, on the other hand, undertook to rise above such local and temporal conditions.

"Isto enim modo dicere licebit Jovem semper barbatum, Apollinem semper imberbem, caesios oculos Minervae, caeruleos esse Neptuni. Et quidem laudamus Athenis Vulcanum eum, quem fecit Alcamenes, in quo stante atque vestito leviter apparet claudicatio non deformis. Claudum igitur habebimus deum, quoniam de Vulcano sic accepimus."²

Cotta contended that the Epicureans were too much attached to the old and he ridiculed the thought of the gods in human form as an arbitrary assumption of age and convention.

"Quid, si etiam, Vellei, falsum illud omnino est, nullam aliam nobis de deo cogitantibus speciem nisi hominis occurrere? tamenne ista tam absurda defendes? Nobis fortasse sic occurrit, ut dicis; a parvis enim Jovem, Junonem, Minervam, Neptunum, Vulcanum, Apollinem reliquosque deos ea facie novimus, qua pictores fectoresque voluerunt, neque solum facie, sed etiam ornatu, aetate, vestitu; . . . Quid igitur censes? Apim illum, sanctum Aegyptiorum bovem, nonne deum videri Aegyptiis? Tam hercle quam tibi illam vestram Sospitam, quam tu numquam ne in somnis quidem vides nisi cum pelle caprina, cum hasta, cum scutulo, cum calceolis repandis."³

Cotta's ridicule of Velleius and the Epicurean system carried him to extremes, no doubt, but the underlying significance of his stinging rebuke is clear.

"Habebam, inquis, in animo insitam informationem quandam dei. Et barbati quidem Jovis, galeatae Minervae; num igitur esse tales putas?"⁴

These passages from Cotta's review show plainly enough what was in Cotta's mind, viz., that he thought the Epicureans' conceptions of the separate gods were all too much influenced by earlier premises, that their theoretic, speculative theology

¹ Cic. N. D. I 30, 83.

² Cic. N. D. I 29, 81-82.

³ Cic. N. D. I 30, 83.

⁴ Cic. N. D. I 36, 100.

had been cramped by older beliefs upon which it was built and of which it was an outgrowth; and that the Epicurean vision of gods not only included a Jupiter, a Juno, an Apollo, a Minerva, a Neptune and a Vulcan, but that these conceptions were too much restricted by artistic or fanciful associations of popular art and cult.¹ But this result was not only a possibility or even a probability, but indeed a psychological inevitability under all the circumstances,—determined by the original freedom allowed under Epicurus' *principalia*, by Epicureans' continued participation² in established forms of worship and by the profound Epicurean belief in the anthropomorphic nature of the gods,³ which facilitated this distinction⁴ between divinities and the retention of those ideal characteristics of the individual gods not in conflict with the Epicurean definition of divinity.

Epicureanism went beyond the old polytheism,⁵ and that innumerable company of new gods remained nebulous and

¹ See Picavet, p. 109, and Masson, p. 289, on the influence of sculpture upon Epicurean thought; also, Cic. N. D. I 30, 85 *Novi ego Epicureos omnia sigilla venerantes*.

² Cf. Significance of Worship and Prayer among the Epicureans, T. A. P. A. xxxix (1909), pp. 73-88.

³ Cic. N. D. II 17, 45: *Restat ut qualis eorum natura sit, consideremus; in quo nihil est difficilius quam a consuetudine oculorum aciem mentis abducere. Ea difficultas induxit et vulgo imperitos et similes philosophos imperitorum, ut nisi figuris hominum constitutis nihil posset de dis immortalibus cogitare; cujus opinionis levitas confutata a Cotta non desiderat orationem meam.*

⁴ The "physical constitution" of the Epicurean gods did not prevent an ascription to them of distinctive and differentiating noble personal qualities. Lachelier, *Les Dieux D'Épicure*, Rev. de Phil. I (1877), pp. 264-266; Scott, *The Physical Constitution of the Epicurean Gods*, Jour. of Phil. XII (1883), pp. 212-248; Guissani, *Lucretius* (1896), vol. I, pp. 227 ff.; Gli Dei Di Epicuro; Munro, *Lucretius* (1893), vol. II, p. 293; Mayor, Cic. N. D. (1891), vol. I, p. 143 ff.; Hirzel, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 46-90. These arguments represent an effort to reproduce the doctrines of Epicurus about the "physical constitution" of the gods. The whole argument was part of esoteric Epicurean wisdom, "a recondite and technical doctrine", accepted as confirmation of the belief in the immortality of the gods. But as R. D. Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean* (1910), p. 296 has said: "the identity of these cascade-like gods would, after all, differ from human identity in degree only and not in kind".

⁵ Philodemus, p. 84, vv. 26-30; cf. also all arguments resting on the *isovopula* theory (e. g. Cic. N. D. I 19, 50).

vague, comparable in a sense to the *numina* of old Roman religion and the *umbræ* of Roman eschatology. But a complete denial¹ of the personalities of the old gods, crystallized to the Graeco-Roman imagination by a long period of time and process of thought, was not part of Epicurus' plan or an element in Epicurean speculation. The Venus-Aphrodite of the Lucretian invocation has not lost her personality. She possesses all the attributes of divinity as Epicureanism conceived divinity, but in inspiring grace and exalted beauty she is the goddess of the old Graeco-Roman world.² In the aspiration of the Roman poet there exists a blending, in perfect harmony, of theological definitions with older, warmer attributes of divinity acceptable to Epicurean experience. Venus is addressed as queen of the skies, the earth and the seas, whose power animates all living things throughout the whole natural universe of which she is the chief ruler. But to the old idea of the goddess of regeneration a loftier significance is given.³ The sensitiveness of Lucretius was peculiarly aware⁴ of the insidious and compelling influence of nature's marvellous and majestic power over minds less courageous,—a power which in the thunder, in the lightning, in storms at sea, in appalling

¹ Si una omnium facies est (Cic. N. D. I 29, 80) is the hypothesis of hostile criticism which, levelling away all distinctions between Epicurean deities, contemplated an indistinguishable uniformity among these gods. Ridicule (Cic. N. D. I 27, 76; I 44, 123; II 23, 59; De. Div. II 17, 40) of these divinities was inevitable as well as bitter criticism (Cic. N. D. I 41, 115-116; I 43, 121-44, 124) not only of worship of gods who did not appear to care for mankind, but also of the Epicurean employment (Plut. adv. Col. c. 11, 1112 C; Non Posse Suav. Vivi sec. Ep. c. 21, 1102 B; Origen. contra Cels. VII 66, in Usener, p. 259) for purposes of worship, of the old machinery of cults, rituals and festivals. Despite caricature of the gods themselves, despite condemnation of Epicurean worship and prayer, in spite of charges of sham, hypocrisy and cowardice, the fact remains that for the sincere Epicurean the gods remained a reality and an entity of greatest inspirational value. The question of personality of the Epicurean gods must take some account of the explicit expressions and clear implications of Epicureanism itself.

² See, for another view, Masson, p. 261.

³ For interpretation of this Lucretian invocation as an Epicurean prayer, see Cl. Phil. II (1907), pp. 187-192, and T. A. P. A. xxxix (1909), p. 88.

⁴ Lucretius V, 1204-1209.

earthquakes, awakened a dread of gods with limitless control. Lucretius¹ knew well that the natural human instinct of the Italian and his predisposition toward an animistic interpretation of nature might readily influence the imagination of even one trained in Epicureanism to accept, again, the *imperium* of Roman gods as harsh task-masters of his destiny. But such a step was far removed from the natural and permissible Epicurean retention of ideal associations of peace, beauty and love and predication of such qualities with the individualized Epicurean goddess of the remote *inter-mundia*. Venus in a finer spiritual sense remains the delight of gods and of men and the blessed mother of the Aeneadae.

In contrast to the tendency toward Universalism involved in Stoicism, the Epicureans by the terms of their philosophy of religion and by their religious experience were conservators of what seemed best in the older polytheism of Greece and Rome. Epicurus predicated immortality of the gods, and this imaginative flight of the idealist² was his supreme effort to maintain the true gods of Hellas above all change and corruption.

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¹Lucretius VI, 56-63.

²Cf. Hicks, p. 298.